

February 20, 2003

AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ALERT Number 10

Informing you about news, events, data releases, congressional actions, and other developments associated with the American Community Survey (ACS).

NEWS IN THIS ALERT:

- * Update on ACS FY '04 Budget
 - * ACS Voluntary Test Scheduled to Begin in March
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UPDATE ON THE ACS FY '04 BUDGET

The American Community Survey (ACS), like many domestic programs, is facing a leaner budget—a situation brought about by national priorities that necessarily provide accelerated funding for national defense and homeland security.

Nevertheless, the Administration remains committed to full implementation of the American Community Survey and a re-engineering of the 2010 census. Only the timing of full implementation is being changed.

Recognizing that the ACS was unable this year to ramp up to its full implementation rate of 250,000 addresses a month (3 million a year), it is the Census Bureau's current plan to begin mail-out at the full implementation rate in late June 2004, for the 4th quarter of FY 2004 (July – September). The Administration is requesting \$64.8 million to fund that plan.

ACS VOLUNTARY TEST TO BEGIN IN MARCH

As an experiment requested by the Congress, the Census Bureau will conduct the American Community Survey beginning on March 1 as a voluntary survey. The monthly survey will continue to be voluntary for at least three months and possibly longer, depending on funding.

The Census Bureau has worked closely with Congress to design a test that will gauge the impact on data quality and costs. We expect costs to increase when the survey is voluntary, rather than mandatory. The American Community Survey is designed to replace the census long form in 2010. The census is mandatory.

The Census Bureau will monitor and assess closely survey expenses and response rates. [It does not plan to conduct the survey on a voluntary basis indefinitely.]

HOUSING INFORMATION FROM THE ACS PROGRAM: VITAL TO IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY WELL-BEING AND UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY NEEDS

Change profiles from the Census 2000 Supplementary Survey and 2001 Supplementary Survey, the national test of the ACS program currently under way in 1,239 counties nationwide, confirm anecdotal evidence of a statistically significant rise in the median value of single-family homes in the New York City Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (PMSA)—from \$224,334 to \$242,811. That kind of information is a forerunner of the wealth of data on housing topics that policymakers will have once the American Community Survey is fully implemented.

Information collected on housing and homeownership for different population groups gives policymakers a “heads up” on the effectiveness of housing programs, and helps identify the kinds of services—such as financing, repair, or renovation—that homeowners might need.

Homeownership is the traditional indicator of community stability. High rates of homeownership are often synonymous with access to good schools, health care, and emergency and other services that attract long-term capital investment and growth. Tables produced as data products from the American Community Survey program showing homeownership as it relates to other characteristics of households (such as the average age, income, or number of vehicles owned per household) reveal important trends in household mobility. Using this kind of information, Fulton County, Pennsylvania, an ACS test site, was able to demonstrate a need for, and fund, a mobile medical van to serve homebound elderly populations.

Federal policymakers will use data from the ACS to manage a variety of programs relating to housing and community development. A recent report commissioned by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) identified a number of ways the ACS could improve

housing programs sponsored by that agency and concluded: “Despite the differences between the ACS and the long form and the adjustments HUD will have to make to use ACS data, the Department and its clients will be better off with more current data than the long form can provide.” <http://www.huduser.org/publications/pdf/ACS_FINAL_REPORT.pdf>, p. 2.

What kind of HUD programs will benefit from these data? One example is the *Worst Case Needs* report, which identifies areas with severe housing problems, especially excessive rent burden. Additional data from the ACS will allow HUD to “expand its discussion of severe housing problems” in the report . . . “to the State, metropolitan, and jurisdiction levels.” <http://www.huduser.org/publications/pdf/ACS_FINAL_REPORT.pdf>, p. 91.

Building strong communities is a commitment at all levels of government. Current data from the American Community Survey can contribute significantly to achieving this goal.

EVENTS UPDATE: NEWS CONFERENCES

Census Director Charles Louis Kincannon and other senior staff have held press conferences in Austin, Texas; Baltimore, Maryland; Boston, Massachusetts; New York, New York; Virginia Beach and Richmond, Virginia; and Washington, D.C. to highlight demographic changes in several states and large cities since 2000. These changes are reflected in new 2001 Supplementary Survey data on characteristics such as home value, income, child poverty, education, travel time to work, and language spoken at home. Commerce Under Secretary Kathleen Cooper will highlight similar data for California, Nevada, and Arizona on February 21, 2003 at a news conference in Sacramento, CA.

CONTACT US

If you have questions or comments about the American Community Survey or the Supplementary Surveys, please call 1-888-456-7215 or e-mail <cmo.acs@census.gov>.

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